The Social Side of Education is a lens for examining and bringing insight into a critical oversight in the mainstream debate on educational reform and its policies: The idea that teaching and learning are not primarily individual accomplishments but rather social endeavors that are best achieved and improved through trusting relationships and teamwork, instead of competition and a focus on individual prowess. The social side approach is anchored by a solid evidentiary base, and offers strategies that can guide policymaking and educational interventions.

The approach's key ideas include:

- Shifting the focus from the individual attributes of stakeholders (e.g., teachers, principals) to the broader context in which individuals operate;

- Highlighting the importance of connections and interdependencies at all levels of the system – e.g., among teachers within a school, leaders across a district, schools and the community;

- Recognizing that valuable resources are exchanged through relationships within and across the overlapping networks of schools and districts;

- Monitoring and strengthening this social infra-structure is necessary for improvement.
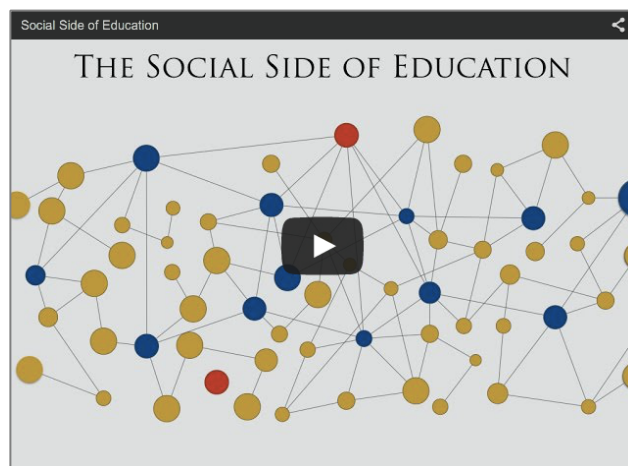
Watch this short video here

Our goal is to inform policies that can help schools capitalize on the power of relationships and collaboration. To this end, we launched the Social Side of Education Shanker Blog Series (see below). We run a session at the 2015 Teaching & Learning Conference, and are planning a one-day conference in April 2016. A second, related convening will take place at the AFT TEACH conference in July 2015. Finally, we will be publishing a policy paper with recommendations for practitioners, leaders and state/federal policy makers.

Shanker Blog "Social Side Of Education" Series

To access the content below visit http://www.shankerinstitute.org/socialsidedigest

1. The Importance Of Relationships In Educational Reform*
By Kara S. Finnigan and Alan J. Daly | July 7, 2014
Most education policies are characterized by over reliance on technical fixes and prescriptive approaches, while paying scant attention to the social context in which reforms are implemented. However, in designing and implementing complex change, it's essential to strengthen collaboration and trust at all levels of the system. Read more.

2. Do Students Learn More When Their Teachers Work Together?*

By Esther Quintero | July 17, 2014

Social capital — the idea that relationships produce value— is largely ignored as a policy lever in education, despite the fact that students learn the most when their teachers are embedded in supportive networks. Read more.

3. Social Capital Matters As Much As Human Capital – A Message To Skeptics

By Esther Quintero | August 4, 2014

Is the social side of education a 'soft' idea? Yes and no. While skeptics are partially right that strong, trusting relationships cannot be created overnight, there are effective, concrete ways to encourage social capital. Read more.

4. No Teacher Is An Island: The Role Of Social Relations In Teacher Evaluation

By Alan J. Daly and Kara S. Finnigan | August 19, 2014

Is there a 'social side' to a teacher's ability to add value to their students' growth and, if so, what are the implications for current teacher evaluation models? Read more.

5. Why Teachers And Researchers Should Work Together For Improvement

By Bill Penuel | September 4, 2014

The worlds of research and practice are separated by a large gap; to close it, practitioners and researchers need to work together for improvement. Read more.

6. Regular Public And Charter Schools: Is A Different Conversation Possible?

By Esther Quintero | September 18, 2014

Are there times when collaboration and competition can complement each other and, in combination, promote systemic improvement? At the system level, could different types of schools serving the same pool of students work in cooperative ways for the greater good of their communities? Read more.

7. A New Focus On Social Capital In School Reform Efforts*

By Carrie R. Leana and Frits K. Pil | October 14, 2014

Organizational success is derived from: 1) intentional, systematic practices aimed at enhancing trust among employees; 2) information sharing and openness about problems and opportunities for improvement; and 3) a collective sense of purpose. Schools are no exception; the benefits of social capital are unequivocal. Read more.

8. All The World's A Stage: How Churn Undermines Change

By Kara S. Finnigan and Alan J. Daly | October 28, 2014

Complex change requires trusting partnerships, strong leadership, and collaborative relationships. Personnel churn, exacerbated by accountability, has the opposite effect: It undermines progress imposing fiscal, human, and social capital costs in school systems. One way to reverse this cycle is by strengthening relationships. Read more.

9. Feeling Socially Connected Fuels Intrinsic Motivation and Engagement

By Esther Quintero | November 20, 2014

To what extent are dispositions such as motivation, persistence and engagement, mediated by relationships and the social-relational context? This post discusses three

studies indicating that efforts to improve learning should leverage social-relational processes, such as how learners perceive (& relate to) their social contexts. Read [more](#).

10. Is Teaching More Like Baseball or Basketball?*
By Esther Quintero | December 8, 2014

Recent research suggests that the sports teams with the most superstars don't always perform the best. Is this true in education? Read [more](#).

11. Constitution For Effective School Governance
By Kenneth Frank | December 10, 2014

What conditions facilitate the collective work of teachers and administrators? A new approach to school governance might help; system-level checks and balances can increase overall trust, coordination, as well as a sense of purpose and shared vision. All are necessary for reform but now lacking in most educational contexts. Read [more](#).

12. Resources On The Social Side Of Education Reform
By Esther Quintero | January 12, 2015

This post offers a list of resources (e.g., blogs, news, books, papers) that will be updated periodically on the research and ideas underpinning the social side of education perspective. Read [more](#).

13. Relationships Matter: Putting It All Together
By Esther Quintero | January 28, 2015

This post features a short four-minute video, explaining why educational improvement is as much about the capacities of individuals as it is about their relationships. Read [more](#).

14. Turning Conflict Into Trust Improves Schools & Student Learning
By Greg Anrig | March 3, 2015

Effective public schools are built on strong collaborative relationships, including those between teachers and administrators. Despite challenges and setbacks, there are remarkable transformations taking place in a number of places across the United States where labor and management are jointly tackling whole district reform. Read [more](#).

15. Teacher Quality - Still Plenty Of Room For Debate
by Esther Quintero | March 17, 2015

The New York Times' asked education experts "How To Ensure and Improve Teacher Quality?" While the answers given are important, there is still a relative inattention to policies and suggestions that would harness the power of the relational/interpersonal level, which we know matters a great deal in the teacher quality equation. Read [more](#).

16. Broadening The Educational Capability Conversation: Leveraging the Social Dimension
by James Spillane | April 15, 2015

To reap the benefits of social capital, we need a better understanding of how to invest in it. A first step is to design organizations and systems that facilitate social interactions among school and school-system staff. And, to do this, it is essential that we understand the factors associated with the presence (or absence) of social ties. This post reviews those factors and offers recommendations for leaders. Read [more](#).

17. Is The Social Side Of Education 'Touchy Feely'?

by Esther Quintero | April 16, 2015

This post reviews the ways in which researchers are quantifying and modeling aspects of the social-organizational context of schools and how these measures are associated with teacher effectiveness, student achievement and school improvement. Capturing the social context of teaching and learning is complex but not impossible. It's being done in increasingly diverse and complementary ways and it is critical work. Read more.

18. Teaching = Thinking + Relationship

by Bryan Mascio | May 5, 2015

Harvard's Bryan Mascio argues that true education reform can only come once we begin to see teaching and learning as highly complex cognitive processes that have vital relationships at their core. Read more.

19. Trust: The Foundation Of Student Achievement

by Esther Quintero | May 21, 2015

Those who advocate for an overly strong focus on testing results in accountability systems often ignore the potential of social-relational and other contextual measures to help schools improve. Read more.

20. Developing Workplaces Where Teachers Stay, Improve, And Succeed*

by John P. Papay & Matthew Kraft | May 28, 2015

A large body of research confirms that teachers have large effects on students' learning and that some teachers are more effective than others. What is largely absent is a recognition of how teachers are supported or constrained by the organizational contexts in which they teach. This post shows how and why context matters. Read more.

21. Starting Closest To Home: The Importance Of Developing Teachers' Understanding Of The Social Contexts Of Their Classrooms

by John Lane | June 11, 2015

Teachers and education reform efforts more generally, would benefit from opportunities to learn about and leverage the large body of scholarly knowledge on the social dynamics of classrooms. Read more.

22. Will VAMS Reinforce The Walls Of The Egg-Crate School?

by Susan Moore Johnson | June 25, 2015

Throughout the U.S. there is an increasing trend toward using value-added methods (VAMs) for high-stakes decisions. However, when policymakers use VAMs to identify, reward, and dismiss teachers, they may perpetuate the egg-crate model of schooling and undermine efforts to build instructional capacity school wide. Read more.

Access all these resources and more at http://www.shankerinstitute.org/program/socialside

*Reprinted in the Washington Post.